

**UTILIZING WRITING-ACROSS-THE-CURRICULUM PRINCIPLES  
IN THE TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM: RETHINKING TEACHING  
STRATEGIES AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA**

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## ABSTRACT

Writing-across-the-curriculum (w-a-c) programs have become firmly entrenched in a large number of universities throughout the USA. Many universities, however, still have not adopted the program itself nor the major tenets of this program. Since w-a-c addresses learning and teaching strategies that are applicable "across the curriculum," its adoption, if only by individual teachers in various disciplines, can result in students writing better and learning more about these subject areas, while they are writing. By requiring that students write more while exploring and acquiring the meaning-making strategies of their disciplines, students become more proficient writers while learning more about their respective disciplines. In order to do justice to this innovative approach, teachers must develop evaluative criteria that reflect w-a-c principles.



## Table of Contents

Utilizing Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Principles in the Traditional Classroom: Rethinking Teaching Strategies and Evaluative Criteria . . . . .	1
The New Role of the English Department . . . . .	4
Adapting Teaching Strategies to W-A-C Guidelines . . . . .	5
Developing Evaluative Criteria . . . . .	5
Final Remarks . . . . .	13



## **Utilizing Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Principles in the Traditional Classroom: Rethinking Teaching Strategies and Evaluative Criteria**

Although "writing across the curriculum" (w-a-c) is widespread, its tenets are still not known to all instructors who could benefit from it.<sup>1</sup> Since this approach fosters better writing skills and facilitates more learning on the part of students, I feel that teachers in institutions that have not adopted this program formally should be given (and would want to be given) means by which they can institute themselves some of the major provisions of this innovative approach to foster better writing and enhance learning.

This approach is innovative insofar as it departs radically from the conventional ways "freshman comp" has been taught for so long.

It is innovative, too, in that it fosters learning while imparting writing skills. Instead of writing about the significance of Heather's "scarlet letter" or metaphoric language in a given poem, students write much more than in conventional writing programs and write more about topics in those fields of study that interest them the most: engineering, management, aviation, etc. Writing instruction is no longer the sole province of the English department, but is practiced regularly in each of the disciplines. If the major contention of this theory of writing (and learning) holds true, then students learn by writing and learn to write more effectively while writing more and about topics which interest them the most. "Writing enables us to find out what we know--and what we don't know--about whatever we're trying to learn..." (Zinsser, 1988, p. 16).

By writing we are forced to order those free-floating and random particles which possess--according to modern information theory--a maximum amount of information because they are not ordered or haven't been posited in any perceivable frame of reference. A system with a high degree of randomness possesses the greatest information potential<sup>2</sup>. It is through the act of ordering, which is what the act of writing is all about, that the random bits of information take on contours and assume a hegemonious relationship to each other. By the process of writing, random information takes on meaning, i.e., semiotic relationships are established as random words are posited within meaning-bearing, textual and intertextual contexts. According to Charles Bazerman, "once a rhetorical field is highly developed, individuals find themselves in the middle of intertextual webs within which they can act only by modifying the intertextuality through new statements. [Their] goals and activities influence [their] idiosyncratic placement in and interpretation of that intertextual field... By reconstructing the literature around their ongoing work and then representing their new work within that reconstructed matrix of the literature, individuals make the field over fresh and construct a new place for the self" (1992, p. 67).

Thus students learn by developing meaning-making strategies. Students take part in creating the world (i.e., discipline) that they are exploring through language. Language helps them organize their perception of the world and how they think about it. As a consequence, students' writing reflects not only modes of discourse and manuscript skills, but methods of thinking and ways of knowing, as well. "By understanding how knowledge is constructed, [students] can judge what knowledge it is they wish to construct...Once they become aware that language is one of their most fundamental, and most sensitive, tools of knowledge construction, they cannot escape the conclusion that rhetorical studies are an inevitable part of methodological training, as much as education in statistics, analytical techniques, or laboratory experimentation..." (p. 68).

"Knowledge" in the disciplines has been relativized and in its place has sprouted an active questioning and interpreting rather than an encyclopedic accumulation of facts. "There has been an increasing focus on the tentative nature of "truth" ...Each of the subject areas has shifted away from a belief in a verifiable, constant, and stable body of knowledge toward the view that meaning is fluid and depends on individual interpretation, firsthand evidence, or new information..." (Langer, 1992, p. 72-3).

If we instructors are to facilitate this learning experience, we have to keep in mind those teaching strategies that enable students to benefit from writing programs. In my paper, I have filtered out --from the plethora of teaching tips published in recent years-- those teaching strategies that can be employed by instructors "across the disciplines" even in those institutions that have not formally adopted the tenets of "writing to learn" or "writing across the curriculum" programs. It is up to us to "teach across the curriculum" if "writing -across-the-curriculum" hasn't been implemented in our institutions.

Instructors who adopt and practice the tenets of this philosophy of learning will encourage better writing practices while fostering learning within their respective disciplines.

It gives us all an opportunity to respond to our own gripes about how poorly students write, whereby we usually assume that poor writing on the part of students reflects either poor preparation by the English department, mirrors weaknesses in primary and secondary education, or simply reflects faulty logic and reasoning prowess on the part of the students. But according to a committee study by Ralph Rader, "when student writing is deficient, then it is deficient in ways having to do with the student's real control of the subject matter of his discipline and not in ways having to do with the special disciplines of English or Speech departments..." (1965, pg. 5).

How many instructors continually ask themselves when evaluating a paper whether they should "read between the lines", that is to say, look for argumentation and sound reasoning that simply aren't there, attributing faulty reasoning to a lack of communicative skills, rather than to a lack of knowledge. It is as if we acquiesced to a system that separates knowledge from the ability to express this knowledge in concrete terms in a readily understandable standard language. If a student has acquired knowledge about a certain aspect of economics, aviation, or business



management, should this student not be able to relate in writing "how inflation rates affect investment strategies," or "how an aircraft turns," or perhaps "how sound leadership principles can be employed in a particular workplace environment." Isn't it time to refuse to accept students' pleas that they know the concept, but simply aren't able to express it (at least not in writing)?

Finally, "teaching across the curriculum" requires that we teachers adopt a new mind-set, one that is tolerant of other discourses and one that considers not just teaching but learning and examines ways that students use language to acquire knowledge. We have to admit that "language, learning and teaching are inextricably linked" (Russell, pg. 41).

If we insist that students write in an academic discourse, whose sole purpose is --as Peter Elbow alludes to-- for academicians to write to other academicians, then we have missed the mark. Thus we place our students in double jeopardy: on the one hand, we demand that they express themselves in writing in order to learn; on the other hand, we strait-jacket their attempts at free expression by insisting on their employing a discourse, with which they are not familiar, and that they will most probably (especially at the undergraduate level) never have to use again (Elbow, 1991). Besides, if "teaching across the curriculum" is to be successful, we have to enable students to write in all subject areas. If we insist on their using the special discourse associated with a particular subject area, they would have to learn perhaps a half-dozen different discourses in order to satisfy their professors.

If we take a formalistic "skills" approach to writing instruction, we miss the mark, too. We must concern ourselves with the quality of students' writing output, not with formalistic conventions. A clear and adequate focus on a topic buttressed by a logical, readily transparent structure are more important criteria for evaluating students' writing than are spelling, punctuation, and other potential errors.

We cannot allow ourselves to share "the formalist view that judgments about writing can be divorced from judgments about content. From this perspective, *writing well* means observing conventions of diction, usage, syntax, and organization, conventions that are presumed to apply to all good writing and that can be identified even if one knows little about the subject matter being discussed...." (Odell, 1992, pg. 86-7).

Instead, we have to respect the various meaning-making strategies of our disciplines. The deductive reasoning associated with most expository writing, for example, runs counter to the type of writing (and reasoning) considered essential in the natural sciences. Here, of course, the rigors of the scientific method prevail: induction of hypotheses based on observation, deduction of implications of the hypotheses, testing of the implications, and confirmation or disconfirmation of the hypotheses (Gay, 1992, p. 6).

## THE NEW ROLE OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

In traditional university programs it has been the sole province of the English department to teach writing. Although multifarious in their individual attempts to teach writing as a skill, still those English instructors tasked with teaching writing have customarily equated learning to write in a traditional English department with learning mechanical aspects of error-avoidance, learning organizing schemes, and learning with equal intensity various approaches to literary criticism.

Although recent articles espouse the equal, but not superior, role of the English department in w-a-c programs, and emphasize that the English department is but one of many varied voices to be heard in establishing and administering w-a-c programs (Russell, 1992 & Blair, 1988), still I feel that this attitude causes more problems than it solves. For one, freshmen do not possess, for the most part, adequate writing skills. Only in rare instances do beginning students possess writing skills that could enable them to deal propitiously with expository writing as required in most departments. If not the English department, who is to teach these rhetorical skills? The chemistry department? Physics profs? Should these instructors seek help from their colleagues in other disciplines? If this is the case, then wouldn't help be sought from the colleagues in the English department anyway? The problems encountered in attempting to enlist help from and to train colleagues in departments other than the English department are described in Fulwiler (1984).

Doesn't it make more sense to require that all freshman take writing instruction from those instructors who have been trained in rhetorical skills instruction? If a program were developed to accommodate most aspects of modern writing theory to include, but not limited to: writing as process; developing adequate focus and structure; various modes of written communication; various methods of development; writing about literature; basic research methodology (to include annotating sources, etc.); and identifying and avoiding common errors, then freshmen could benefit from exposure to and the practice of sound writing skills. Even if these freshmen are required later on in their studies to assume another writing style or academic discourse unique to their major, they will still have benefitted from learning the basics of written communication in an academic setting. One can violate a norm only after one has learned it.

Besides, practicing expository writing in a freshman comp class allows students to write about subjects with which they are familiar and that they choose to write about. It is a chance to focus on the nuances created by altering--if ever so slightly--a thesis statement. It is a chance to see the need for valid argumentation and a sound structure to support the thesis statement. It is a chance to practice rhetorical devices such as the linguistic devices associated with coherence while again writing about a topic of their own choosing. It is a chance to learn to identify and avoid logical fallacies.

Just which skills students assimilate for future use when writing in the disciplines becomes a personal choice, but a choice based on sound practices developed while experimenting in freshman comp or its equivalent. Later, adjusting to new standards becomes much easier due to the experience gained in a beginning general writing course.

The physical make-up and size of the university will determine whether basic writing instruction takes place in the English department, communications department or the school of rhetoric. That basic writing instruction should take place in a department which houses "qualified resources" should be a *sine qua non* of any w-a-c program.

Even if basic writing instruction, however, should once again be the primary domain of the English department, this does not absolve colleagues in the other disciplines from their responsibility for using writing as a means to learn. It is the purpose of this paper to address how all instructors can incorporate basic tenets of a w-a-c program into their teaching strategies and how this can result in improved writing, enhanced learning, and a better overall product.

### **ADAPTING TEACHING STRATEGIES TO W-A-C GUIDELINES**

What can we instructors in other disciplines, and in institutions that have not adopted w-a-c guidelines, do to help our students springboard from basic writing instruction they might receive in the English department to the "writing [and thinking]...[that] become a primary and necessary vehicle for practicing the ways of organizing and presenting ideas that are most appropriate to a particular subject area...[in which] writing becomes a major vehicle of instruction in all the academic disciplines" (Langer, 1992, pg. 71).

What teaching strategies (and evaluative criteria) can we employ to give students the opportunity to write more and to learn more from their writing? To what extent does the nature of the writing assignment affect what the students write and how they write it?

Do we encourage our students to take a stand--to delve into critical inquiry challenging their own slowly evolving positions as well as the established "authorities?"

If we accept the contention that writing reflects methods of thinking and ways of knowing (an epistemic process), we teachers should be forced to reflect on pedagogical choices, teaching strategies, the role language plays, and evaluative criteria, in order to do justice to students' attempts at expressing themselves while making sense of the discipline they are exploring and the world of discourse within which this field is posited.

Making sense of the teaching experience means understanding learning. Once we understand how learning takes place --especially through writing and language-- we can develop "learning strategies" that make good use of w-a-c guidelines. This intentional twist in

pedagogical "logic" illustrates a changed view of teaching, stressing instead the "passive" acquisition of knowledge rather than the conscious "learning" associated with more conventional approaches (Dhority, 1984).

The teaching strategies that follow reflect the pedagogical principles discussed above. They are intended as guidelines on how we can better adjust our teaching tactics to elicit more learning through writing. These strategies are culled from numerous sources, from personal experience as a writing instructor<sup>3</sup> as well as from professional tips shared with colleagues and gleaned from numerous publications. They reflect most of all how I have been able to assess how students enter and participate in the epistemic process while writing. They are teaching tips that can be employed by instructors in all disciplines.

In order to establish writing as a means for learning, it is imperative that we give the students more opportunities to write. This means weekly, if not daily, writing assignments. This also means assigning research papers and other longer and more extensive assignments. It also means having students write in non-formal contexts without subsequent formal evaluation, but with well-intended, worthwhile feedback from us or from their peers.

One viable suggestion is to have students engage in *exploratory writing*. This type of writing has several manifestations. The simplest is journal writing.

Students are required to keep journals making several (un)assigned entries on a regular basis. This type of exploratory writing should be the core of any w-a-c program. Since students are writing under the premise "that anything goes", they are free to express themselves, their doubts, and their discoveries without penalty of failure, or fear of a poor grade or revealing their "inadequacies." Abbott, Bartelt, Fishman, and Honda call "journals...personal excursions in self-expression...." (1992, pg. 113). Journal writing remains personal or public on a sliding scale determined by the student. S/he can share insights with the instructor or with classmates during cooperative learning exercises.

The major advantage of this type of writing is its spontaneity of expression and its freedom from convention. Students write without any formal constraints for the free expression of ideas on paper. They are able to vent their feelings, views, attitudes, and insights and discover how these take shape during the transmogrification from isolated idea to context-related written utterance. This is student-centered and -determined writing. Regular, but brief, journal-writing sessions reinforce course content and provide opportunities for reflecting personal ideas and feelings regarding the course material. (Abbott, et al.)

Journal writing is non-threatening. It enables us to suspend judgment on how something is written and concentrate instead on what is being said. Students' journal entries can help us determine where we need to be clearer, what material needs to be reviewed, and when we should introduce new ideas (pg. 108-09).

It is the type of writing that has an analogous multimedia form **hypertext**, the computer-based technology that enables users to explore using random searches that are enhanced with multimedia applications. In discovering what they know (and don't) by concretizing their ideas on paper, students explore beyond any boundaries artificially imposed by an instructor's tasking. An attempt to explore the molecular properties of a substance, for example, might result in a student exploring the legal implications of in vitro fertilization. Within the branching environment of hypertext --or dialogic journal writing-- students transcend disciplinary boundaries, heightening their awareness of interdisciplinary connections and contexts.

This type of writing results in multiple voices. It is our responsibility to respect these multiple voices and not to discard those that do not reflect the official view without first weighing these multiple voices [including the official one(s)] against each other and determining their relative soundness.

"...If we judge a text--a journal entry, an early draft, or a final draft--to be well or poorly thought out, we can base our judgment, at least in part, on the extent to which that text reflects the use of patterns of thought that are appropriate for the context at hand. If we devote class time to helping students understand these meaning-making strategies, they should be able to function more effectively as members of a particular intellectual community" (Odell, 1992, pg. 89).

These informal writing exercises serve other purposes, too. Students can be asked to put on paper (journal entry) prior to a day's lesson what they have learned from the reading assignment. Within 5 minutes' time, students will have anchored their thoughts to the lesson at hand, will have assessed how much they can recall from their reading, where the uncertainty lies, and the instructor can use these "thoughts" as a catalyst to start the day's lesson. As an intermediary step (which will be discussed in more detail under **cooperative learning** below), students can discuss their "insights" in small cooperative learning groups prior to classroom discussion.

One strategy that we all can employ is borrowed from the theorists in the rhetorical disciplines, namely *writing as process*. Writing as process is a label for a way to view the efforts of any individual engaging in putting his thoughts on paper. The writer enters into a series of steps, which, for the most part, are never considered totally complete until s/he is forced ---probably due to a deadline-- to turn in a finished product. This is a non-linear process, other than a recipe that requires following sequentially a series of steps until a finished product results. In the recursive process of writing, the writer triggers an idea, focuses it somewhat, gathers data in order to support this central idea (the purpose for writing), perhaps modifies the main idea to reflect insights gained while gathering supporting data, shapes these according to the central idea and relative to what information has been gathered, and, perhaps, reformulates the thesis statement (main idea) in order to reflect supporting material, the structure and other ordering constraints and to reflect gaps in the writer's own knowledge discovered while engaged in this process.

This strategy is more than a rhetorical tactic. It is the way most of us write *volens volens*. It is seldom that we sit down and allow an outpouring of thoughts to trickle from our fingers through a keyboard or writing implement to paper and then try to sell this as a finished product. The care we take and the insights we gain as writers and communicators (=teachers) can be shared with our students if we allow them to enter this process prodded and guided by us.<sup>4</sup>

We can ask the students, for example, to formulate a thesis statement, a purpose statement to indicate how they perceive a given written assignment, and then evaluate these (cooperatively or one-on-one) without asking first for the finished product. Especially beginning students with little writing experience can profit from this well-meaning direction given to writing assignments. We don't need to allow students to lead themselves astray and thus be corrected *ex negativo*, for their failures. Isn't it conceivable to guide our students through one or two developmental writing assignments, step by step, so that they see the light and without risk of major failure?

The same strategies can be employed throughout the process of writing, from thesis statement to supporting data, from structuring to drafting and revising.

We can give meaningful assignments to students to allow them to acquire new and synthesize existent knowledge. In so doing we use *writing to foster understanding*.

Such assignments enable students to grasp issues at deeper levels. Depending on the formulation of the assignment, students can be urged to explore areas that might otherwise remain out of reach for them. If we take pains in how we formulate written assignments, we can nudge students into areas of our disciplines not readily known or accessible, but nevertheless important, to the uninformed novice scholar.

While exploring these otherwise inaccessible, but significant, areas, students become aware of gaps in their own knowledge. Without exploring, students are not aware of the extent and number of these gaps.

In fostering understanding, writing can also be seen as *an explanatory tool*. By writing about how a given mechanism operates, or by simply describing this very same mechanism, students learn. This applies not only to these engineering applications, but to biology, chemistry, and the humanities, too. "Learn what pollination is by attempting to describe it in your own words!" "Explain (in writing) the chemical processes in play by the vulcanization of rubber!" "What is so significant about a red wheelbarrow?"<sup>5</sup> "What role does compressibility play in rotor-wing aircraft approaching transonic speeds?" By entering, exploring and completing these assignments, students learn. They acquire new knowledge, "reposit" old knowledge into new contexts, and discover gaps in their knowledge base, which prohibit them, perhaps, from readily absorbing the material they are exploring.

It is the same process that we enter when we prepare and execute material for a given class. As such, can't we have students emulate us in "playing teacher?" In one class I taught

for the first time, in a field with which I was not intimately familiar (history of aviation regulation), and on short notice, I decided to "deputize" my students, to have them explore the various "Acts" and report back to the class on their findings. I provided the frame of reference, the reporting criteria (developed in unison with my deputies); they did most of the foot- and brain-work. They benefitted from this experience because they were forced to survey the available data, make connections and make these findings understandable to others in the class.

When we write to explore, understand, or explain (if only to ourselves), we are using a tool that enables us to *make use of the decision-making process*. Whether as teacher, scholar, budding novice scholar (student), manager, or senior officer, we require knowledge in order to make an informed decision. This is the reason why managers and supervisors at all levels of command require their subordinates to write. By writing, we are exploring options. The individual with access to (an analysis of) the most options, can make theoretically the most-informed decision.

Students enter this process, too. They are constantly confronted with options --and thus decisions to be made-- when narrowing down a topic, determining research strategies, and developing a viable structure. They make decisions when including or discarding information.

By sorting and weighing information, students learn to refine not only their knowledge base, but their opinions about the subject matter, as well.

By giving students in our disciplines meaningful assignments, we can have them enter the decision-making process without first ascending the corporate ladder. We can challenge them to explain their interpretation or definition or to examine evidence on which they base their conclusions. Are they summarizing pre-masticated information and points-of-view or are they exploring new avenues?

We can employ *cooperative learning* techniques in order for students to learn by their writing efforts. By entering small, personally defined discussion groups consisting of their peers, students have the chance to take an intermediary step before sharing their insights with the entire class and with the instructor. They have the opportunity to exercise self-control, to try to get the message across, to refine the message to ensure comprehension within the group, to receive feedback, and to learn from the error-correction processes they enter into with others in the group.

## DEVELOPING EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

Akin to developing adequate teaching strategies to encourage students to write more and learn by writing, we must develop adequate and fair evaluative criteria to do justice to students' attempts at written expression.

We must be creative and open to new ideas about "gauging" evaluative criteria. As Odell maintains, "...different ways of knowing have heuristic and epistemic significance: each can be a useful strategy for reflecting on one's subject matter..." (1992, pg. 92).

"It [is] important to establish evaluation as part of a larger epistemic process. If teachers in any discipline want students to engage in meaning making, the students will surely benefit from evaluations that help them understand that process more fully...if the writing-across-the-curriculum movement is to flourish, we must persuade both colleagues and students that judgments about the quality of writing cannot be separated from judgments about the quality of meaning making reflected in that writing...If we persist in separating ways of writing from ways of knowing, we shouldn't be surprised if students persist in writing well about nothing" (98).

Instead of seeking particular information in students' papers, we should explore the ways in which students have presented their ideas. The focus should be on a student's ability to formulate ideas and defend them.

Our flexibility must include using other sources to help evaluate students' writing: we can use colleagues within and without our department; we can solicit the help of students and graduate assistants to make a "first pass" evaluation; we can under the cover of anonymity conduct group evaluations of papers during classroom sessions; we can use newly developed software that allows an electronic interchange to provide immediate feedback while "blue-penciling" corrections.

One way to evaluate student writing fairly is to practice *multiple evaluative readings*. This entails our reading first for substance or content, before concerning ourselves with sentence structure, grammatical errors, punctuation, orthography, etc. This enables us to concentrate on essentials without becoming lost in the deluge of errors often encountered while evaluating student compositions. Subsequently, we can read for sound structure and organization. A third reading would concern itself with style; the final evaluative reading would focus on correctness.

When we read for *content* or substance, we are looking for more than just the information presented; we have to focus on the thinking that is evidenced in the student's writing. We cannot fall prey to the "formalist view of writing [that makes] a distinction between writing and content that separates the evaluation of writing from students' understanding of the subject...." Instead, we have to take "...an epistemic approach to evaluation that begins by identifying the ways of knowing that are valued for particular writing tasks" (Herrington and Moran, 1992, pg. 46).



We are evaluating whether the purpose for writing has been clearly expressed in the student's composition; we are controlling to what extent the paper is focused on a single, controlling idea. We are determining whether there is enough information and evidence to support the initial contention.

At the same time, we are interested in discovering gaps or missing material or even unnecessary repetition or extraneous material.

We are questioning whether the body and terminal sections of the paper keep the promise made to the reader in the introduction.

When reading through for information, we are also checking to see whether a biased attitude has been allowed to creep into a student's paper through the use of opinionated adjectives.

A second reading should concern itself with *organization*, or structure. We have to determine whether the composition has an introduction, a body, a conclusion. We ascertain whether the introduction states the controlling idea and announces, when necessary, the major parts.

We discover whether paragraphs are in a logical order and whether each paragraph develops completely its topic. We discern whether transitions and summaries are used to aid the reader, where appropriate. We question the conclusion's validity: does it return to the controlling idea and summarize, when necessary, the major parts?

These considerations are not exhaustive. They are intended as guidelines to follow when analyzing students' writing in multiple evaluative readings.

After determining the validity of the content and organization of a paper, we can direct our attention to stylistic matters. We can explore, for example, whether the student has used coherence to bind the individual sentences within paragraphs and from paragraph to paragraph. Has the student used coordination, parallelism, subordination, emphasis and variety in building sentences?

We can establish whether the language level is suited to the reader. We can look at sentence and paragraph length. We can examine word choice and see if active verbs predominate.

Only after we have subjected the composition to these first three consecutive readings, should we pay attention to problems of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and format.

By evaluating these elements last, there is a manifold positive effect: first, we are not immediately swayed to give a student a poor grade based on what we perceive initially as poor work due to spelling and other errors without first evaluating the paper according to the more

significant criteria outlined above; second, we force ourselves to weigh the merit of a composition by determining how well it communicates and delivers on its promise to explain; and third, we are able to assess a grade based primarily on how well a student reveals to us s/he has grasped the assignment and has been able to put his or her individual response into written communicable language.

If we determine a partial grade after each evaluative reading, we are perhaps doing more justice to the total achievement of the student. At the same time, by separating the grade into 2-3 parts, we can provide positive motivation by first indicating to the student what s/he has achieved without regard to manuscript mechanics, and, secondly, by indicating to what extent the student has jeopardized an otherwise good grade by **not** paying attention to spelling, punctuation, etc.

For these errors, I would establish a system by which an initial grade would be established. From this, I would deduct points respectively for major deviations in each of the categories discussed above. Thus, a student who received an A- (90-93) for content might have 1-2 points deducted for serious stylistic errors within the range of an A-, i.e., s/he might receive a "91" instead of a "93." If that same student were docked 5 or more points for numerous spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors, that "91" could easily turn into a grade between "80" and "85" or even lower.

It would become clear to a student that s/he could compromise an otherwise good grade by not paying attention to these areas of manuscript mechanics, with which we teachers are so concerned. At the same time, we are still focusing on development of ideas and sound structure, both of which should reflect sound thinking and a critical mind.

In any event, we should not view our concepts of writing as a recipe to be religiously followed by our students. We shouldn't look for replication rather than reasoning in students' writing, but we should foster critical thinking and making connections, on their part. (Langer, 1992, pg. 82ff.)

Preliminary, non-binding grades could be assessed by peer groups, as well. Students who would have to assess a grade based on what s/he considered valid argumentation, proper focus, etc. would be more apt to think about good writing principles and meaning-making strategies when composing his or her own paper. Of course, this could only work if we required that these peer groups substantiate why they assessed a given grade.

If our evaluative criteria for student writing are to do justice to the tenets of the writing programs we are establishing, then we must give the students more opportunity to write. This holds true for tests. We must abandon multiple-choice and true-false tests and, in their place, institute testing procedures that require students to give extensive responses to questions we pose. We must test not only their ability to think on paper; we must be able to assess, as well, how they are able to synthesize knowledge and express the resultant product.

## FINAL REMARKS

This type of questioning (and testing) can have far-reaching implications in the classroom. If we expect responses that demonstrate sound thinking processes on tests, then we must not demand encyclopedic knowledge of students in class. Names and numbers, dates and biographical data should be relegated to the status of appendages to true knowledge. This kind of information is often given a false emphasis by the fledgling writer; yet, it is readily accessible to anyone versed in how to look it up. The knowledge we seek and transmit to our students requires students entering and delving into heuristic processes.

Students will learn new ways of knowing and methods of thinking which result from their writing about these topics. They will become in time accomplished writers if they write often and are given meaningful assignments. They will be able to assume the discourse of their discipline once they've passed their initial flight tests, from fledgling novice to accomplished ace.

And lest we lose track of how we fit into the process of teaching across the curriculum and into our roles as teachers but also into our roles as professional communicators, let us remember that we are engaging --if on a meta-level-- in the same learning process when we prepare and deliver our lessons and when we write for publication in professional forums.

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1. According to Herrington & Moran (1992), writing across the curriculum has been implemented in one-third of institutions surveyed.
  2. Shannon's well known postulation equates systems with the maximum amount of unordered particles as having the greatest potential information. (Shannon & Weaver, 1964).
  3. I base my observations on experience I've gained teaching second language acquisition (English and German), comparative literature, and rhetorical skills classes.
  4. It is certainly worthwhile to allow students insight into how you put your ideas on paper. It could help debunk the prevailing myth that experienced writers produce publishable finished products from the start if we shared our "messy work" with the students from time to time.
  5. This question alludes to "The Red Wheelbarrow," a poem by William Carlos Williams. My underlining.